

Black River Canal
Locks 39-43
South Side of Route 46
Boonville Vicinity
Oneida County
New York

HAER No. NY-83

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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NY-83

BLACK RIVER CANAL, LOCKS 39-43

Date: 1838-1842
1848-1855

Location: South side of Route 46, Booneville Vicinity, Oneida
County, New York.

Significance: Locks 39-43 near Booneville are typical of the 109 locks
that comprised the 25 miles of the Black River Canal.
A feeder to the Erie Canal, the Black River Canal re-
mained in use until 1923 and outlasted many other feeder
canals to the Erie. The good condition of these locks
make them valuable examples representing typical canal
construction of the 19th century.

Transmitted by: Dan Clement, 1983. Historical report prepared by the
Canal Museum, Syracuse, New York.

THE BLACK RIVER CANAL 1836-1924

The Black River Canal was to be a feeder to the Erie Canal and a highway for North Country goods. It took a long time to build; it suffered from insufficient water in the summer and too much spring runoff; it had almost as many locks in the twenty-five miles from Rome to Boonville as the Erie did between Albany and Buffalo. Yet its use and disuse have a continuing fascination of their own for the historian, the canal hobbyist, and the casual York State visitor driving beside the remains of that once busy waterway.

Surveys were made of canal routes upcountry from Rome several times. James Geddes made two: one by way of Boonville and the other through Camden to the upper waters of the Black River and on to Ogdensburg. When nothing happened, petitions were forwarded with regularity to Albany. In 1828 a private group capitalized the Black River Canal Company at \$400,000. Again, nothing happened. Three years later, Holmes Hutchinson made still another set of surveys. These led to a discussion of using inclined planes to supplement the locks for moving boats between the summit level at Boonville and Rome. When no decision was made by the State, the entire project again slowed down.

By 1834, still no canal had been started. The State tried again, this time with Timothy B. Jervis as engineer. He presented a report the following year. The enlargement of the Erie would require additional water flow from the feeders, making a Black River canal more practical, and so construction was finally authorized in 1836. Work was begun on contracts where bids were acceptable to the State. Then in 1842, all canal construction was suspended. Work was finally resumed by 1848 and in 1850 the first boats passed through from Rome.

Additional reservoirs were created in the back country to supply the canal and feeder. Dams were built on the pond at Forestport, at Woodhull and at Wolf Lakes. In 1853 the North Branch reservoir was approved as were, two years later, those at South Branch and Chub Lakes. Work on these and others was completed, suspended, abandoned, or extended with the addition of new dams here and there, seemingly dependent upon the changing whims of both nature and man.

The canal was finally completed in 1855. Attention was then focused on efforts to improve the river extension from Lyon's Falls to Carthage. Two plans, one for locks and dams, the other for dredging and a new channel, were proposed. Dredging was begun and then abandoned. Lock contracts were eventually let, and in 1861 river navigation opened.

Across the State lateral canals were not proving to be as economically beneficial as the main line Erie. Agitation was felt everywhere for closing these laterals. The Black River was saved from the fate of its sisters in 1878, however, because it did feed the summit level of the Erie Canal.

As with most canals, the Black River suffered aging problems. Locks tended to deteriorate, breaks drained the prism, and bridges rotted. To continue operation, the locks and bridges were rebuilt. Natural breaks were repaired, too. Still, three major breaks on the Forestport feeder in three successive years did seem unusual. Investigations led to the trial of thirteen men and an end to man-made catastrophes.

Business continued to fall off on the canal. In 1900 the Superintendent of Public Works suggested that section two be abandoned between Lyon's Falls and Boonville. State neglect of repairs led to the eventual cessation of traffic in that section by 1905. Then the coming of the Barge Canal System and the construction of Delta Dam brought new life to the "Little Ditch", for stone was needed. A route was even surveyed from Carthage to the Sacketts, Harbor area,

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with prism and locks of Barge Canal System size proposed. Nothing came of this project in the long run, though.

New dredging projects were carried on from 1918 to 1920. Farm bridges and locks were repaired, too. But, in 1922 only 150 tons moved along the waterway. No travel was recorded in 1923 and the following year the Boonville state scow was brought down to Rome, the last boat over that stretch of water.

The Black River Canal has seen the end of its boating days, but still, water flows down to Delta and on to the Barge Canal System - following a path of history and nostalgia - of locks, boats, people and North Country life.

	<u>Canal</u>	<u>Feeder</u>	<u>River</u>
Construction			
Authorized	1836	1836	1836
Begun	1838	1838	1854
Finished	1855	1848	1861
Length	35½ mi.	10 mi.	42½ mi.
Width			
Surface	42 ft.	46 ft.	60 ft.
Bottom	26 ft.	30 ft.	40 ft.
Depth	4 ft.	4 ft.	5 ft.
No. locks			
Lift	109	none	2
Guard	none	1	none
Lock size		90 ft.	160 ft.
Length	90 ft.	15 ft.	30 ft.
Width	15 ft.		
Total lockage	1,082½ ft.	--	9½ ft.
Boat tonnage	70-76 tons	70-76 tons	--
Motive power	Horses and Mules Used		--

The Black River Canal

distances in miles

Distance from:	To:	<u>cumulative</u>	
		Rome:	Boonville:
Rome	0	0	25
Ridge Mills	2	2	23
Lock No. 7	3	5	20
Walworth's Str. Hse	1	6	19
Delta	1 fm	7	18
Westernville	2 Wlwth	9	16
Wells Brk. Aqueduct	2	11	14
Stringer's Crk.	1	12	13
Aqueduct			
Lock No. 31	2	16	9
Lansing Kill			
Dam	1	17	8
Lower Falls	2	19	6
Upper Falls	2	21	4
Lock No. 70	2	23	2
Boonville	2	25	0
Sugar River	3	28	3
Little Falls	1	29	4
Port Leyden	3	32	7
Lyon's Falls	3	35	10

<u>Black River from:</u>	To:	Lyon's Falls:	Carthage:
Lyon's Falls	0	0	42
Turin Landing	2	2	40
Fish Crk. Landing	2	4	38
Carter's Landing	2	6	36
House Creek	2	8	34
Tiffney's Landing	1	9	33
Otter Creek	2	11	31
Independence Creek	4	15	27
Long Reach	2	17	25
Beach Landing	3	20	22
Smith's Landing	5	25	17
Illingworth Landing	1	26	16
Beaver River	6	32	10
Stoney Creek	4	36	6
Deer River	1	37	5
Carthage	5	42	0

Figure 1
Black River Canal

No and Lift of Locks. feet & inches											
Lock No	Lift	Lock	Lift	Lock	Lift	Lock	Lift	Lock	Lift	Lock	Lift
1	20		10		10		10		10		10
2	10	20	10	30	10	50	10	70	10	92	10
3	20	21	10	30	10	57	10	75	10	83	10
4	10	22	10	40	10	58	10	70	10	94	10
5	10	23	10	51	10	59	10	77	10	95	10
6	10	34	10	57	10	60	10	79	10	96	10
7	10	25	10	63	10	61	10	70	10	97	10
8	11	26	10	64	10	62	10	60	9	98	10
9	12	27	10	65	10	63	10	61	0	99	10
10	11	28	10	66	10	64	10	62	0	100	10
11	11	29	10	67	10	65	10	63	9	101	10 1/2
12	11	30	10	68	10	66	10	64	9	102	10 1/2
13	1	31	10	69	10	67	10	65	10	103	10
14	2	32	10	70	10	68	0	66	11 1/2	104	10
15	2	33	10	71	10	69	9	67	10	105	10
16	10	34	10	72	10	70	0	68	10	106	11
17	2	35	10	73	10	71	10	69	10	107	11
18	10	36	10	74	10	72	10	70	10	108	12
19	2	37	10	75	10	73	10	71	12	109	12

